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Fighting Cosmic Warriors: Lessons from the First Seven Years of the Global War on Terror

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This article argues that a successful strategy for fighting the Global War on Terror (GWOT) requires actions aimed not only at defeating the Al Qaeda network and denying its operatives sanctuary, but also efforts to delegitimize Al Qaeda's ideology; the United States has focused on the former at the expense of the latter. The GWOT requires a new strategy, one that continues to target Al Qaeda operatives and their assets, while undermining Al Qaeda's message. This requires a better understanding of Al Qaeda's ideology, how U.S. foreign policy may fuel that ideology, and a strategy for undermining militant Islam's worldview.

In the days following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., President Bush announced that the United States would execute a Global War on Terror (GWOT) with the aim of routing out terrorist entities wherever they existed and, specifically, dismantling Al Qaeda: "Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."[1] Seven years later, the U.S. government claims that it has taken out three-fourths of Al Qaeda's leadership.[2] The Bush administration has also executed two wars—Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq—with the aim of denying assets to global-minded terrorists. Despite these efforts, Al Qaeda and "Al Qaeda-esque" terrorist operations have continued in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. The persistence of terrorist activities suggests that a new strategy is needed, one that reaches beyond dismantling the Al Qaeda network and its assets.

This article focuses on Al Qaeda's ideology, emphasizing its religious underpinnings, and distinguishing it from Al Qaeda's strategies for realizing its vision. It argues that a successful strategy for fighting Al Qaeda's ideology requires actions aimed not only at defeating the Al Qaeda movement and denying its operatives sanctuary, but also efforts to delegitimize Al Qaeda's theological message; the United States has focused on the former at the expense of the latter. The current strategy, which relies heavily on military action, may actually be feeding the ideology of Al Qaeda, particularly Al Qaeda's claim that Islam is under attack and requires all Muslims to wage *jihad* in defense of the faith, and that Muslims are engaged in the ultimate battle of Good versus Evil. The GWOT requires a new strategy, one that continues to target the Al Qaeda network and its assets,

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while undermining Al Qaeda's message. This requires a better understanding of Al Qaeda's ideology, how U.S. foreign policy may fuel that ideology, and a strategy for undermining militant Islam's worldview.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section draws on Sociologist Mark Juegensmeyer's concept of "cosmic war" as a framework for understanding Al Qaeda's ideology, which claims that Islam is under attack from internal and external forces, requiring all Muslims to wage *jihad* in the ultimate battle of Good versus Evil. Section two investigates the origins of Islam's cosmic war imagining, arguing that Al Qaeda's message is not new but builds on the mid-twentieth century Islamic activists of Hassan Al Banna, Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, and Abd al-Salaman al Faraj. Section three looks specifically at Al Qaeda's ideologues—Sheikh Azzam, Osama bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri—arguing that Al Qaeda's message outlines a two-prong threat to Islam: impious Muslims leadership and its sponsor, the United States. It then outlines the manifestations of Al Qaeda's ideology, including the movements, organization and networks of Al Qaeda and the different strategists the ideology supports. The fourth section draws on polling data to suggest that U.S. foreign policy actions—specifically its conventional wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, its use of force to target Al Qaeda's core leadership, and its use of Manichean rhetoric—are consistent with and possibly supporting Al Qaeda's ideology. The article concludes by arguing that the United States faces a series of catch-22s in its foreign policy options, but it has room to retool its rhetoric in the GWOT, which could help to delegitimize Al Qaeda's Manichean message.

Cosmic War and Al Qaeda's Message

Al Qaeda and other militant Islamic movements around the globe today claim to be taking up arms against threats—perceived or real—to their faith. Although the U.S. government has taken precautions to state that it is not at war with the Muslim world, the adversary America faces still involves an interpretation of Islam. Bin Laden and others associated with the Al Qaeda movement have offered an ideology—a set of ideas aimed at changing the social and political status quo—that is rooted in Islamic thought. What is the religious imaginings of Al Qaeda's ideology? Why is Al Qaeda's message resonating with some Muslims? Why are some Muslims taking up the call to wage *jihad*, including giving their lives for the fight?

A useful framework for investigating Al Qaeda's ideology and its impact on the Muslim world is Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer's concept of "cosmic war," which argues that religions use violence when they believe that spiritual battles are occurring in the here-and-now and that these battles require the adherents to participate in the ultimate battle of Good versus Evil in defense of the faith. Al Qaeda's message conforms to the logic of cosmic war thinking.

Juergensmeyer contends that the seeds for cosmic war thinking are present in most religions and that this potential rests in the scriptures and beliefs of nearly all faiths. He hypothesizes that religion's primary purpose is to establish "ultimate order" and that this process involves conquering the "ultimate disorder," which is death.[3] Sacrifice and depictions of spiritual battles—present in most religious scriptures or beliefs—are symbolic representations of a religious system battling with and attempting to conquer Evil, which is death and disorder.[4] In times of "threat and calamity"—such as war, occupation, corruption, lawlessness, and natural disaster—cosmic war and earthly violence can become conflated and some believe the celestial war between Good and Evil is occurring in the here-and-now. When conflated, earthly battles become holy battles and vice versa; this is cosmic war.

Symptoms of cosmic war include a "dichotomous opposition on an absolute scale."[5] This Manichean logic divides the world into opposing forces that are drawn into two distinct camps, "us vs. them," where the "us" are certain of their position, their cause, and their justification. Cosmic wars are also punctuated by a sense of urgency; adherents need to act immediately to defend the faith against imminent threat. Yet, paradoxically, at the same time, the battle is ancient and seen as lasting beyond a lifetime.[6] Cosmic wars may have earthly goals, like the seizure of the state or control of land, but ultimately cosmic warriors have a grander goal of realizing the victory of right over wrong and ushering in a new era of post-apocalyptic peace and harmony.[7]

Cosmic war promises periods of suffering, bloodshed, injustice, and trials, in which the truly faithful will prevail; cosmic war, in other words, is the apocalypse. This period of trial and suffering is not the end, but rather paves the way for a new era of peace and justice in which all things are made right. This new era, also known as the millennium, is the ultimate theological hope for this world. Cosmic war invites individuals to participate in something greater than themselves and to give their lives to the ultimate cause. The promise of this new era assures the faithful that their suffering is not in vain; it and their lives are for a greater cause—the salvation of the world.

Cosmic war, therefore, holds the highest stakes of any battle imaginable—the triumph of Good over Evil. Juergensmeyer notes that, somewhat ironically, these stakes make the most abhorrent actions legitimate because they are committed on behalf of God for the ultimate victory.[8] Another symptom of cosmic war, therefore, is the absence of limits or constraints in targets and actions. This includes killing civilians, dissenters within one's own faith, even the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life on behalf of God. Ultimately, cosmic war makes violence a sacred duty to preserve the faith and, as such, all options are on the table.

Juergensmeyer posits that there are two ways out of a cosmic war—total victory or defeat, or "redirecting the theology," which means offering interpretations of the faith that contradict the apocalyptic imaginings of cosmic war and its need for violence.[9] Total victory is the millennium. In real world terms, it is difficult to realize and presents more pragmatic problems than possibilities. For example, militant Islamic movements that aim to establish or reestablish the faith in social and political realms do not operate on a unified front; there are Shi'a and Sunni groups fighting for these goals such as the Lebanese Shi'a Hizbollah and Sunni Al Qaeda. However, Sunnis and Shi'as have different understandings of what political and religious leadership should look like.[10] Moreover, within these sects there are groups that are fighting for different goals, such as the Sunni Hamas, which has Islamic and nationalist goals for Palestine, and Al Qaeda, which has pan-Islamic, post-nationalistic goals. In other words, these movements' concepts of "total victory" are not unified in practice. This goal is an ideological vision that is open to interpretation.

Total defeat is equally as unrealistic to imagine in real-world terms. Tiny cults, like Jonestown, may be eradicated. But cosmic warriors within major world religions are not as easily wiped out, for two reasons. First, according to Juergensmeyer, most religions contain the seeds of cosmic war in their scriptures and beliefs; attacking cosmic warriors is treating the symptom of cosmic war, not the cause. Second, attacking cosmic warriors directly feeds the ideology that the faith is under dire threat and requires immediate action of the faithful; attacking cosmic warriors thus runs the risk of encouraging more recruits.

Ending cosmic war through a redirection of theology, on the other hand, offers real-world possibilities. Several religions have examples of radical redirections of theology that have pacified the faith. For example, Hinduism has a martial past and contains scriptures depicting divine battles and cosmic war imaginings, particularly the *Bhagavad Gita*, which

describes the personal anguish of Prince Arjan as he is forced to confront his own cousin on the battlefield.[11] The twentieth-century writings and life example of Gandhi turned this epic into a battle of overcoming earthy temptation, and the need for duty, self-sacrifice and, above all, love.[12] In other words, Gandhi redirected the theology by spiritualizing the battle. Christianity has also gone through a process of spiritualizing the battle. The Crusades and Inquisition are examples of very bloody examples of comic war imaginings in Christianity. Today, real world Crusades are a thing of the past and violence in the name of Christianity is relatively small and sporadic relative to the faith's over two billion adherents.

Islam has the potential for the same redirection of theology. The term *jihad* means literally to "struggle or strive." Most Muslims recognize two *jihads* in Islam: The *Greater Jihad* is to struggle spiritually in one's life, to strive to overcome temptations and to lead a pious life. The *Lesser Jihad* is the physical struggle to defend the faith, which involves the use of force.[13] As will be described, militant Islamists like Al Qaeda emphasize the lesser *jihad* but there is room to challenge this interpretation and reemphasize the priority of the greater *jihad* in Islam today.

Militant Islam's Ideology: The Roots of Al Qaeda

11 September forced the United States to pay attention to a problem that had been in the making for decades, namely interpretations of Islam that describe the faith as under attack and call for adherents to rise up and defend the faith with their very lives. Al Qaeda's leaders—specifically Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri—were not the first to interpret the faith in these terms. Al Qaeda's ideology has its roots in the writings of mid-twentieth-century Muslim revivalists—specifically Egyptian Hassan Al Banna, South Asian Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, Egyptians Sayyid Qutb, and Abd al-Salam al Faraj—who called for Muslims to turn away from foreign ideologies and embrace Islam as a total way of life, socially, spiritually, politically, and economically. These activists describe Islamic societies as being in a state of crisis caused by the penetration of Western, secular ideologies—particularly Capitalism and Marxism—and the failure of Muslim political and religious leadership to direct society in the right path of Islam. According to these ideologues, the path to salvation requires Muslim societies and their leaders to return to Islam, and look within their faith for the template to live a rightly guided life as individuals, societies, and nations.

Most scholars agree that Hassan al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, established in 1928, is the father of modern day Islamic "revivalism," of which militant Islam is one strain.[14] Banna argued that Egyptian and Muslim society more broadly was in a state of crisis due to Western imperialism and weak, ineffective Muslim political and religious leadership. Egyptian society had strayed away from the path of God by investing in Western, secular ideologies—including both Capitalism and Marxism—and materialistic pursuits. Only by retuning Egyptian society to its true faith and identity—Islam—could it flourish and shake off Western influence. Banna's vision for restoring Egyptian society to the faith was not built on violence but the concept of grass-roots revival that would, in turn, transform society and eventually the government. The Brotherhood spread quickly throughout Egypt and into other Muslim countries, presenting a challenge to the existing political, religious, and social order. As the Brotherhood gained momentum in Egypt, it developed a paramilitary branch that ultimately was blamed in the 1948 assassination of the Egyptian prime minister. Banna, in turn, was executed in 1949, becoming a martyr for the faith.[15]

Around the same time as Banna, the South Asian journalist Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi created the ideological template for the modern Islamic state. Similar to Banna, Mawdudi argued that Muslim society was under threat and had become weak and vulnerable to Western influence because it had strayed from its true, Islamic nature. He asserted that Muslim society could only be restored to its strength and totality by returning to Islam, which offered a complete template for spiritual, social, political, and economic life.[16] Unlike Banna, Mawdudi believed that the government was the best vehicle for transforming society. To this end he founded the political party Jamaat-i-Islami in 1941, which became active in Pakistani politics following Partition in 1947. Mawdudi and the Jamaat-I-Islami criticized Pakistan's new government, which was founded on secular principles. He argued that Governor General Jinnah's government was leading society into a state of *jahayilla*, a term used to describe the ignorance of humanity before the revelation of the Qur'an.[17] Mawdudi called for the creation of an Islamic state that would uphold Muslim law, *Sharia*, and stamp out innovation within Islam, particularly the Ahmadiyyah sect. In 1977, Mawdudi was arrested and his party outlawed in the general elections; the state, however, did not execute Mawdudi and he died of natural causes in 1979.

Egyptian Sayyid Qutb has received considerable academic attention as the intellectual bedrock upon which Al Qaeda was built, but Qutb's ideas have their foundation in both Mawdudi and Banna.[18] Raised in a pious family, Qutb's thinking took a dramatic turn after attending graduate school in the United States in 1949. Qutb became highly critical of American support of the Arab–Israeli war and of American society, which he found licentious and racist.[19] After returning to Egypt, Qutb wrote extensively on an authentic Islamic ideology that would not only replace the secular ideologies of Capitalism and Communism, but would surpass their moral bankruptcy and provide a true and complete way of life. Building on Mawdudi, Qutb argued that it was the government's role to provide the moral framework and instruction that would lead society out of *jahayillah* and into the right path of Islam. In 1952, the Muslim Brotherhood collaborated with Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers movement to depose the king and institute a republic. Qutb and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood believed that the time had come to bring their Islamic revival to the government; Nasr, however, rejected their vision for an Islamic state.[20] A 1954 assassination attempt on Nasr landed Qutb in jail, where he was tortured before his release in 1964. He was imprisoned again in 1965 and hanged in 1966 for sedition.[21] Qutb's writings, including particularly *In the Shade of the Quran* and *Signposts*, were translated into scores of languages and read throughout the Muslim world.[22]

Building on the writings of Qutb, Egyptian activist Abd al-Salaman al Faraj, called for Muslims to violently defend the faith against the Sadat regime in his booklet *The Neglected Duty*, circulated in the late 1970s.[23] Faraj argued that *jihad* was the forgotten duty of Muslims and that force was not only necessary but also required for all Muslims to defend and purify the faith from the threat of corrupt Muslim leadership and secularism. This interpretation inspired the Egyptian Islamic Jihad to assassinate Sadat in 1981; Faraj was executed in connection with the assassination.[24]

Al Qaeda's Ideology

The ideology of Al Qaeda is a continuation of the arguments of Banna, Mawdudi, Qutb, and Faraj. Foremost is the overarching sense of threat present in their thoughts; the perception that Islam is in grave danger from both internal and external enemies and that this threat is both worldly and cosmic. People have strayed from the true path of Islam and poor Muslim leadership, influenced by the West, is to blame for this crisis. Islam's true path is laid out

in the Qur'an, and the Sunna—the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad—and is best realized by the example of the Prophet's companions, the *salaf al-salahin,* earning proponents of this ideology the title *Salafis*.[25] In order to realize the true path, the faithful must take direct action, including force, to restore Islam to its rightful place as the foundation of society and government and to unify the worldwide Muslim community. These thoughts are expressed in Al Qaeda's key ideological thinkers: Sheikh Azzam, bin Laden, and Zawahiri.

Perhaps the most important Muslim thinker to influence Bin Laden and Al Qaeda's ideology was the Palestinian Cleric Sheikh Abdullah Azzam.[26] Educated at Egypt's Al Azhar University, the historic seat of Sunni religious education, Azzam became an *'alim*, or religious scholar, earning him the title Sheikh. Prior to becoming the ideologue of the Afghan *jihad* in the 1980s, Azzam taught at the King Abdullah Aziz University in Saudi Arabia, where he met bin Laden.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Azzam issued a *fatwah* (Muslim legal edict) declaring the invasion a threat to Islam and calling *jihad* a *fard ayn*, making *jihad* an individual obligation for Muslims everywhere to expel the enemy in defense of the faith. Echoing Faraj, the *fatwah*, titled "Defense of the Muslim Lands," named *jihad* as the "first obligation after Iman (faith)" and that "one of the most important lost obligations is the forgotten obligation of fighting."[27] Azzam argues in his *fatwah* that it is the obligation of those closest to the threat to fight the enemy. If the willing are insufficient, the obligation "spreads in a circle from the nearest to next nearest. This process continues until it becomes *fard ayn*—or an individual obligation—upon the whole world."[28] He acknowledges the need for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation through giving money and aid, but argues that giving one's life is more valuable. "The presence of one Arab among [the Afghan people] is more loved by us than one million dollars."[29] Azzam further argues that *jihad* is obligated on all Muslims not only for the defense of Afghanistan, but also his birth home, Palestine, which is "the foremost Islamic problem."[30] The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, the Grand Chair of the Ulama in Yemen, and the Egyptian Writers Union, among others, endorsed the *fatwah* as true and legitimate.[31]

In 1980, Azzam moved to Pakistan, as did bin Laden, where he taught and continued to urge Muslims from around the globe to come to Afghanistan to wage *jihad* in defense of the faith. He wrote frequently in the Arab language paper *al Jihad* and penned several tracts aimed at encouraging foreign recruits for the *jihad*.[32] One essay, "Join the Caravan," reiterates the call for all Muslims—particularly Arabs—to fulfill their duty and participate in *jihad*:

> Anybody who looks into the state of the Muslims today will find that their greatest misfortune is their abandonment of Jihad (due to love of this world and abhorrence of death). Because of that, the tyrants have gained dominance over the Muslims in every aspect and in every land. The reason for this is that the Disbelilevers only stand in awe of fighting.[33]

"Join the Caravan" also argues: "In this case, there are two duties which we are trying to establish: the duty of jihad (fighting) and the duty of arousing the believers."[34]

In "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations," Azzam elevates *jihad* and martyrdom to a new level, contending that: "The life of the Muslim *ummah* (community) is solely dependent on the ink of its scholars and the blood of its martyrs." Azzam goes on to argue that "Indeed those who think that they can change reality, or change societies, without blood,

sacrifices and invalids [sic], without pure, innocent souls, then they do not understand the essence of this *deen* (religion)."[35]

Following the end of the Soviet–Afghan war and Azzam's assassination in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and began to formulate his own messages, calling for an Islamic awakening to defend the faith.[36] Initially bin Laden's focus for *jihad* was on neighboring Yemen, which was experiencing unrest between the Communist-run government and Islamic militants in the North.[37] Bin Laden's attentions shifted to the Saudi government, however, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the Saudi government's decision to allow U.S. troops to base on Saudi soil. The government's policy enraged bin Laden, who proposed that his Afghan Arab vets could defend Saudi soil without U.S. assistance.[38] The Saudi government's decision to allow U.S. troops on Saudi soil caused a split within the royal family and Muslim theologians, the *ulama*. The King secured a *fatwah* from a member of the *ulama* that declared the presence of U.S. troops as legitimate, but the decision enraged other Muslim scholars who spoke out against the king and formed an opposition, the *sahwa* (religious awakening).[39] Amid this controversy, critics issued a letter in 1991 to the Saudi government, blaming its impiety as the reason for the kingdom's weakness and inability to defend itself.[40]

During the 1991 Gulf War, bin Laden developed a two-pronged argument of the threat facing Islam: the Saudi government, which allowed infidels on sacred soil, and the United States, which "invaded" the Arabian Peninsula under the guise of providing security for the region, the near and far enemies, respectively.[41] Bin Laden argued that the best means of destroying the internal threat to Islam was by going after the external enemy; once destroyed, the Saudi government and other U.S.-supported Muslim regimes would collapse.[42] In addition to its support of the Saudi royal family, bin Laden's vitriol for the United States includes its economic dominance of the global market, its spread of secular and capitalist ideals, and its support of Israel and the demise of the Palestinians. During Operation Dessert Storm, for example, bin Laden called for a boycott of U.S. goods as a means of protest because the United States sends money to Israel, which kills Palestinians.[43]

Under increasing concern over his rhetoric, the Saudi government placed bin Laden under house arrest in 1991, then allowed him to leave the country for Pakistan that same year before ultimately expatriating him three years later.[44] In 1994, after two years in Sudan, bin Laden began issuing statements to the Muslim world through The Advice and Reform Committee, a London-based center that aimed to wake up the Muslim world from complicity and challenge the Saudi royal family.[45] These messages began with a critique of the head *'alim* in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Baz, for endorsing the Oslo accords and issuing the *fatwah* that permitted the presence of U.S. troops on Saudi soil.[46] Other messages criticized the Saudi government for its support of the communists in Yemen, its crackdown on dissident theologians, its overall need for religious and political reform, and the *ulama*'s need to return to right interpretations of the faith.

In 1996, bin Laden issued a declaration of war against the United States that echoed many of the issues addressed in the Advice and Reform Committee. The declaration argues that the United States, under the guise of the United Nations, has committed a long line of atrocities against the Muslim world, with the ultimate aim of destroying the faith. Front and center to these acts is the presence of U.S. troops on Saudi soil:

> The latest aggression was one of the worst catastrophes to befall the Muslims since the death of the Prophet . . . it was the occupation of the land of the two holy mosques, the cradle of Islam, the scene of the revelation, the source of the

> message, and the site of the holy Ka'bah, the qiblah [to which Muslims turn in prayer] of all Muslims, by Christian armies of the Americans and their allies.[47]

Echoing Azzam's and Faraj's words, the declaration goes on to say:

> There is no greater duty after faith that warding off the enemy, namely the Israeli-American alliance occupying the land of the two holy mosques and the land of the ascension of the Prophet, may God's prayers and blessings be upon him.[48]

In addition to this threat to the faith, bin Laden calls for the overthrow of the Saudi regime, which he argues has colluded with this foreign threat and failed to uphold the faith, particularly *Sharia* law, thus leading to the weakness and vulnerability of the Kingdom.[49] Bin Laden also specifically addresses the Saudi government's crackdown on dissidents and imprisonment of theologians:

> The preachers' and reformers' eagerness to pursue peaceful reform methods in the interest of the country's unity and to prevent bloodshed was clearly demonstrated. So why should the regime block all means of peaceful reform and drive the people toward armed action? That was the only door left open the public for ending injustice and upholding right and justice . . .[50]

The declaration contends that the presence of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia has allowed the government to persecute dissidents; in order to rectify the problem, U.S. forces need to be removed: "While we know that the [Saudi] regime is fully responsible for what has afflicted the country and the people, the main disease and the cause of the affliction is the occupying U.S. enemy. So efforts should be pooled to kill him, fight him, destroy him."[51]

Bin Laden followed his 1996 Declaration of War with a *fatwah* in 1998, declaring that all Muslims must fight the United States in defense of the faith. Echoing Azzam, the three-page *fatwah* declares that fighting U.S troops and civilians is *fard ayn*, an individual obligation of all Muslims:

> The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [Jerusalem] and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah: "And fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah [Qur'anic passage]."[52]

Dr. Aymen al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian medical doctor and one of the co-founders of Al Qaeda, also wrote extensively in the 1990s, echoing bin Laden's ideology on the need for *jihad* in defense of the Muslim faith. A London-based Arabic newspaper published portions of his memoirs, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, following the 11 September attacks on the United States. Zawahiri's memoirs chronicle his youth in Egypt, and the decision to form a clandestine terrorist cell that aided in President Sadat's assassination, leading to Zawahiri's imprisonment and torture.

Similar to bin Laden, Zawahiri blames Muslim leadership as the ultimate target, but the necessary route through which to take out Muslim leadership is by attacking its sponsor, the United States. Zawahiri contends that once Muslim insurgents are able to establish a foothold in the Muslim world, their influence can spread and win Muslims throughout the *ummah* to their cause, ultimately creating a united Muslim nation under the leadership of a restored Caliphate:

> Liberating the Muslim nation, confronting the enemies of Islam, and launching jihad against them require a Muslim authority, established on a Muslim land, that raises the banner of jihad and rallies the Muslims around it. Without achieving this goal our actions will mean nothing more than a mere and repeated disturbances that will not lead to the aspired goal, which is the restoration of the caliphate and the dismissal of the invaders from the land of Islam. This goal must remain the basic objective of the Islamic jihad movement, regardless of the sacrifices and the time involved.[53]

Zawahiri's strategy for restoring the Muslim world is to attack the United States and Israel, which in turn will destroy corrupt Muslim leadership and establishing a pious Islamic government in its place.

Analyzing the messages of Azzam, bin Laden and Zawahiri reveals the logic of cosmic war thinking. First and foremost, Al Qaeda's ideology describes an overwhelming sense of threat to the faith. Islam is under attack and Muslims everywhere are required to take action—including the use of force—to defend the faith. The primary source of threat is corrupt Muslim leadership, which has strayed from the true path of Islam and failed to uphold its tenets. The United States has become embroiled in this threat through its support of these regimes, which—according to these ideologues—props them up and prevents pious, Islamic revisionists from successfully overthrowing their authority and establishing a just Muslim government in their place. It is important to note that this argument does not begin with Al Qaeda. Qutb accused the United States of meddling in Muslim affairs. Shariati and the Ayatollah Khomeini also fingered the United States as enablers of the Shah and his anti-Muslim policies. In other words, militant Islamists are targeting the United States because of its choice of allies in the Muslim world and the perception that it is implicit in corrupt, anti-Islamic governments.

These ideologues describe U.S. foreign policy as a threat to the faith. U.S. support of Israel and Palestinian problem are front-and-center in this argument. Militant Islamists, including Al Qaeda, argue that U.S. support of Israel is intended to weaken and divide the Muslim world. It is worth noting that Qutb formed his ideological thinking during the Arab–Israeli war of 1948, while in the United States. Zawahiri and bin Laden have also pointed to U.S. support of Israel as a conspiracy that is meant to weaken the Muslim world on their home front. Alongside U.S. support of Israel, they cite Israeli—and by implication U.S.—treatment of the Palestinians as an example of Western aggressions and intentions toward the Muslim world as a whole.

The ideologues also name U.S. economic policy as a source of threat to Muslim livelihood and the faith. This is evident in bin Laden's call for a boycott on U.S. products with the outbreak of Operation Desert Storm in 1991. It is also visible in Al Qaeda's target selection on 11 September—the World Trade Center Towers, the literal and figurative seat of international economy, housed by the strongest economic force on the planet, the United States.

The U.S. military is another cited source of threat to Islam. As outlined earlier, Al Qaeda declared in its 1996 statement that the presence of U.S troops in Saudi Arabia was threatening the sacredness of the two Holy Cities. Al Qaeda's later communiqués have also named U.S. military actions as threatening to the faith, and examples of U.S. intentions to destroy Islam. This is particularly true of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which will be discussed further in the next section.

A final source of threat named by the ideologues is secularist values. This is perhaps the oldest grievance of militant Islamists, along with corrupt Muslim leadership, and is universally claimed by all the ideologues mentioned. It is interesting to note that the writings of Azzam and bin Laden criticize the secular values of both communism and liberalism as morally bankrupt. Qutb is critical of secularism not only for its political content, but also its individualist and licentious nature; secularism has no place in their future political and social imaginings.

Ideologues like Azzam, bin Laden, and Zawahiri—and Banna, Mawdudi, Qutb, and Faraj before them—are calling for the *ummah*, the worldwide Muslim community, to rise up and defend the faith against what they perceive to be a real and immediate threat. However, it is a call to fight more than just an earthly battle; it is a call to engage in a cosmic war. The battle has earthly goals—specifically the removal of corrupt Muslim leaders and the repulsion of non-Muslims influences from the territory of Islam—but these are temporal goals that pave the way for everlasting objectives—the reunion of the *ummah* and the community's ability to practice Islam in the right way laid out in the Qur'an and by the example of the Prophet.

In Al Qaeda's ideology, violent *jihad* is the necessary means for realizing the path to salvation. Violence is not just a tactical or strategic imperative; it is a religious mandate. *Jihad*, moreover, is not only about attaining salvation in the next life; it is also about restoring the world and Islam to its right place. Qutb proposed the importance of violent *jihad* in his works, Faraj expounded on this idea—calling it the forgotten obligation—but it was Azzam, Al Qaeda's ideological father, who boiled the formula down to two acts, faith and *jihad*.

Al Qaeda's ideology, in the end, is not just about personal salvation or even life after death, although certainly these elements are present in individual motives for *jihad* and suicide operations. More importantly, Al Qaeda's message is about a threat that faces the *ummah*, and a plan of action to defend the faith from imminent danger; it is an opportunity for empowerment, a call for salvation now, in this world *and* in the next. It is a *cause de guerre* for the community, not just individuals. Al Qaeda promises that grievances will be made right and that a new era of righteousness will arise after the destruction of the old, corrupt order; it is the ultimate battle for this world and for the promise of the hereafter.

Al Qaeda's ideology is broad, prescribing neither a specific organization nor a strategy for realizing its goals. Bin Laden's statements and communiqués call for the Muslim world to rise up, *en masse*, in order to establish a unified and free *ummah*, and that the obligation for Muslims to defend the faith is binding on all. However, beyond imploring all Muslims to "join the caravan," the ideology, in its purest sense, does not prescribe a specific course of action, nor does it embody just one organization. In other words, Al Qaeda's vision supports a number of entities and strategies, making the Al Qaeda phenomenon diverse.

The Terrorist Perspectives Project, for example, argues that the key thinkers in Al Qaeda see themselves as a movement: "Al Qaida and its theological brethren believe that in order to realize a 'restored' Caliphate, they must unify the *ummah* under the banner of Salafi Jihadism. Central to that objective—almost its defining characteristic—is the creation and growth of a movement with a revolutionary vanguard, marching at its head."[54]

There is also evidence to support that, prior to 11 September and particularly between 1996 and 2001, Al Qaeda was an organization: It had visible leaders, a headquarters in Afghanistan, and an organizational structure.[55] Policy analysts Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon go so far as to argue: "In Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda was, in truth, a state. It controlled territory, maintained an army and waged war, forged alliances, taxed and spent and enforced a system of law."[56] Following the initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom, Al Qaeda's state-like structure was disbanded.

Analysts have also argued that Al Qaeda is more of a network than an organization, with like-minded groups dispersed around the globe that are connected through common experiences, such as fighting in Afghanistan, attending specific training camps, or through common sources of financing.[57] The U.S. government tends to think of Al Qaeda in these terms, calling it the "Al Qaeda network."[58] *The Terrorist Perspectives Project* notes, however, that Al Qaeda has attributes that are un-network-like: it cannot be mapped fully because it is vast and spread around the globe; it does not have distinct borders defining who is in and who is out; and the movement has visible leaders—there are still individuals whose ideas drive the actions of its followers. The *Project* further notes that focusing on Al Qaeda as a network does little to help understand its strategic plan.[59]

In addition to the diversity in Al Qaeda's structure, the lack of specificity on how to realize the new Muslim order has also produced several strategists who aim to realize the earthly and cosmic goals of Al Qaeda's vision. Zawahiri and bin Laden proposed a strategy that requires Muslims to attack the "far enemy"—namely the United States, as a necessary first step for toppling the "near enemy," U.S.-backed local Muslim regimes.[60] Their strategy assets that, once the far enemy has withdrawn its support, the near enemy would be easy to conquer, paving the way for pious Muslim leadership.

Brynjar Lia's recent biography on Abu Mus'ab al-Suri also sheds light on another important strategist with a different approach for realizing Al Qaeda's ideology. According to Lia, al-Suri concurs with Al Qaeda's broad goal of freeing the Muslim world from foreign occupation, overturning corrupt Muslim leaders, and unifying the *ummah*.[61] Al-Suri argues, however, that Al Qaeda is only one part of a greater Muslim uprising and that its most important contribution to the Muslim world is its ideology, which provides solidarity and encouragement.[62] In order to realize a unified *ummah* free of corrupt leadership, Muslims should take a much more rational approach to achieving this goal and develop a long term strategy that builds on the lessons learned from *jihadis* and other insurgents.[63] Al-Suri further argues that the global Muslim uprising should not be driven by organizations, but rather by "systems," or independent groups and individuals inspired by Al Qaeda's ideology and loyal to its vision.[64]

Ultimately, the movements, organizations, networks, and individuals attributed to Al Qaeda—along with the different strategies it inspires—are united by Al Qaeda's ideology. It is an ideology with earthly goals—the repulsion of foreign occupation and corrupt leadership—that reveal a much greater battle in which Good will triumph over Evil. Al Qaeda's message calls on all Muslims to fight in defense of the faith and to personally take part in the ultimate battle in this world in order to pave the way for a new era of unification and divine justice.

It is important to take Al Qaeda's ideology seriously because polling data suggest that Al Qaeda's worldview has followers. For example, a 2003 Pew poll showed that 55 percent of Jordanians and 45 percent of Pakistanis gave bin Laden a favorable rating.[65] In 2004, 65 percent in Pakistan rated bin Laden favorably, and 55 percent in Jordan concurred with this view.[66] Polling in 2005 revealed that support for bin Laden had fallen overall, alongside waning support for acts of terrorism in Iraq and Palestine, but favorable ratings toward bin

Laden had rose to 60 percent in Jordan, while declining to 51 percent in Pakistan.[67] Recent Pew polls show an overall decline in bin Laden's popularity, particularly in Jordan where his favorable ratings dropped from 56 percent in 2003 to 20 percent in 2007; in Lebanon, his favorable rating was 1 percent in 2007.[68] More polling is needed to understand exactly what is driving the popularity of bin Laden. But, nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that bin Laden's worldview may be resonating with more than just extremists.

As will be described in the next section, the cosmic war imaginings of Al Qaeda's ideology pose unique challenges for U.S. efforts to counter Al Qaeda as an organization; the policy actions the United States has pursued in the GWOT—specifically conventional wars aimed at denying Al Qaeda sanctuary and operations that target the core leadership of the organization—conform to the cosmic war imaginings of Al Qaeda rather than delegitimize it.

The GWOT and Feeding Al Qaeda's Ideology

In the first seven years of the GWOT, the Bush administration has prioritized dismantling Al Qaeda on two fronts: denying the organization safe havens and surgical strikes against the leadership. The government has also employed rhetoric that divides the world into two opposing camps—those that stand for freedom and justice, and those that support the terrorists. Drawing on the logic of cosmic war thinking, this section posits that these strategies are feeding Al Qaeda's ideology and validating the worldview that Islam is under attack, aiding the perception that this is a Manichean war of Good versus Evil. It proposes that United States needs to remain engaged in this war, but should adopt a more indirect approach that create space for other interpreters of the faith to redirect the theology.

The GWOT began with a military campaign against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that aimed to destroy its authority and the sanctuary it gave Al Qaeda. In the near term, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) accomplished both these pursuits, toppling the Taliban in a matter of weeks and scattering Al Qaeda's leadership.

In addition to targeting Afghanistan as a safe haven for Al Qaeda, the Bush administration also turned its attention toward Iraq. As early as 11 September, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld named Saddam Hussein as an accomplice in the terrorist attacks and began calling for his removal. These assertions culminated with a ground invasion against Saddam Hussein based, in part, on a believed connection between the dictator and the terrorist threat posed by the Al Qaeda network.[69]

In addition to the military campaigns of OEF and OIF, the GWOT also has targeted the core leadership of Al Qaeda. The FBI named bin Laden as its most wanted man in addition to naming around 20 of his associates as targets of the GWOT.[70] Within the first two years of 9/11, the United States killed or captured nearly 20 core members, including the believed number three in command Muhammad Atef (killed in Afghanistan as part of OEF in 2001), his replacement Abu Zubaydah (captured in Pakistan in 2002), his replacement and believed architect of the 9/11 attacks Khaled Sheikh Muhammad (captured in Pakistan in 2003), al-Nashiri, the operations chief and believed designer of the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Africa and the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* (captured in the Arab peninsula in 2002), and the recent capture of abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, the operations chief of Al Qaeda, who was apprehended trying to enter Iraq in April 2007.[71]

Building on the logic of cosmic war, this approach to fighting Al Qaeda conforms to the ideology that Islam is under attack and that divine battles of good versus evil are actually occurring in the here-and-now, requiring all adherents to rise up and defend the faith. This is especially true with the U.S. use of conventional war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Following the commencement of Operation Enduring Freedom in Iraq, bin Laden issued a statement claiming:

> Amid the huge developments and in the wake of the great strikes that hit the United States in its most important locations in New York and Washington, a huge media clamor has been raised. This clamor is unprecedented. It conveyed the opinions of people on these events. People were divided into two parts. The first part supported these strikes against US tyranny, while the second denounced them. Afterward, when the United States launched the unjust campaign against the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, people also split into two parties. The first supported these campaigns, while the second denounced and rejected them. These tremendous incidents, which have split people into two parties, are of great interest to the Muslims, since many of the rulings pertain to them . . .

Bin Laden goes on to say:

> This clearly indicates the nature of this war. This war is fundamentally religious. The people of the East are Muslims. They sympathized with Muslims against the people of the West, who are the crusaders.[72]

According to bin Laden, therefore, conventional war against a Muslim country validates his call for *jihad* in defense of the faith.

The U.S. efforts at capturing or killing senior Al Qaeda leaders, while perhaps not as ideologically validating as full-scale war, also appears to be fueling the message that Islam is under attack and requires individuals to act in defense of the faith. For example, an October 2007 missile strike against an Al Qaeda religious school in northern Pakistan—reportedly carried out by the Pakistani military and the United States—generated cries of condemnation and renewed loyalty to Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the need to wage *jihad*.[73]

Conventional wars and targeted military strikes against Al Qaeda's leaders are not the only actions validating its cosmic war thinking; the U.S. government's rhetoric employed in the GWOT mirrors the Manichean thinking present in Al Qaeda's ideology. In the days following 11 September, President Bush described our new war as a "Crusade," a comment that received immediate criticism from the press and U.S. allies.[74] Perhaps more problematic, President Bush further divided the globe into two camps following 11 September, declaring that: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[75] This rhetoric conforms to Al Qaeda's cosmic war thinking of "us versus them," and divides the world into two opposing and mutually exclusive halves.

The U.S. government has also employed rhetoric that focuses on values, arguing that the United States supports universal values of freedom and justice, while *jihads* impose values of oppression and intimidation. In an August 2006 address to the American Legion National Convention, President Bush argued that:

> The war we fight today is more than a military conflict; it is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century. On one side are those who believe in the values of freedom and moderation—the right of all people to speak, and worship, and live in liberty. And on the other side are those driven by the values

> of tyranny and extremism—the right of a self-appointed few to impose their fanatical views on all the rest.[76]

This language is also present in the recently released "U.S National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication." The drafters, the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), argue that: "America must offer a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in our most basic values. These values include our deep belief in freedom, and the dignity and equality of every person."[77] This rhetoric—just like Al Qaeda's—divides the world into two camps: those that have the U.S. vision of hope and values, and those that do not. Al Qaeda reflects this rhetoric, arguing that the values of the West are antithetical to the true values of Islam. These arguments leave little room for middle ground, further polarizing the world into two competing spheres.

The U.S. government's effort to install democracies throughout the world is another example of actions that conform to Al Qaeda's cosmic war thinking. The PCC names one of the United States's core foreign policy aims as "Promoting democratization and good governance as a path to a positive future . . . "[78] This thinking also supports Al Qaeda's argument that the United States is out to impose its "anti-Muslim values" on the Muslim world. As described earlier, Azzam, Zawahiri, and bin Laden criticize the secular values of both communism and liberalism as morally bankrupt and antithetical to Islam. These Islamists have placed the political ideologies of the West in opposition to Islam. The U.S. government's message mirrors this logic, contending that its ideology is the best path for the world and democracy is the true path to freedom. This rhetoric, therefore, further divides the world into two opposing camps, both claiming to be the "true" way to govern.

Polling data suggest that U.S. actions and rhetoric are affecting perceptions of the United States in the Muslim world and vice versa, creating a reinforcing loop that may further be lending credence to Al Qaeda's message. Surveys conducted by Pew, Gallup and Zogby have found a pervasive overall attitude of "anti-American sentiment" throughout the Muslim world and in the Middle East in particular. Anti-American sentiment is particularly acute in response to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both fought under the umbrella of the GWOT. In 2002, Gallup polled nine countries in "the Islamic world," including Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Morocco, and Indonesia, to measure attitudes toward the United States and its foreign policy actions. It found that: "In every nation in which this question was asked, including Turkey, a majority of those interviewed expressed the view that the American military action [in Afghanistan] is either largely or completely unjustifiable."[79] Zogby polls in 2002 and 2004 of six Arab countries—Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, UAE, and Egypt—echo these perceptions.[80] A 2007 Pew survey found that: "the overall U.S. image remains abysmal in predominately Muslim countries. Notably, solid majorities in every largely Muslim country surveyed—as well as in the Palestinian territories—also say they are very or somewhat worried that the U.S. could be a military threat."[81]

Negative sentiment over U.S. foreign policy is particularly acute in regard to U.S. military operations in Iraq. Prior to the war, in 2002, Pew surveyed countries throughout the world regarding support for armed conflict against Saddam Hussein and found that the overwhelming majority of countries surveyed did not support military action against Iraq.[82] Pew also polled Turks on their attitudes toward a war in Iraq and, specifically, the prospects of the U.S. military using its bases in Turkey to conduct the war. It found that "Fully 83 percent of Turks oppose allowing U.S. forces to use their country, a NATO ally, to wage war on Iraq. Further, a 53 percent majority of Turkish respondents believe the U.S. wants to get rid of Saddam Hussein as part of a war against unfriendly Muslim countries,

rather than because the Iraqi leader is a threat to peace."[83] In April 2003, just after the start of the war, Pew surveyed countries on perceptions of Operation Iraqi Freedom and found favorable ratings for the United States to be "far below levels measured in 2002 and 2000"; ratings in Turkey, Jordan, and Palestine fell to the teens.[84] Pew surveys also asked respondents if they felt that suicide bombings were justifiable and, in particular, justifiable against U.S. and Western forces in Iraq. In 2004, 70 percent of respondents in Jordan felt that it was justifiable, with 46 percent in Pakistan and 31 percent in Turkey concurring, respectively; these numbers declined in a 2005 survey, but still remained at 57 percent in Jordan.[85] These numbers fell in the seven countries surveyed in 2007, with Jordan dropping from 57 to 23 percent and Lebanon dropping from 39 percent in 2005 to 34 percent in 2007.[86]

Moreover, U.S military actions in the GWOT appear to be influencing Muslim perceptions about U.S. intentions to democratize the world. A 2004 Pew survey found that "While populations of predominately Muslim countries are not averse to democracy, they are skeptical of the administration's goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East. The war in Iraq has only intensified these doubts; in March 2004, majorities in Turkey, Jordan, Morocco and Pakistan said the war made them less confident that the U.S. wants to promote democracy."[87]

With these data in mind, it is important to consider a strategy that aims not only to dismantle the Al Qaeda network, but also one that does not lend credence to its ideology; this is the challenge facing U.S. foreign policy in the GWOT.

Deconflicting the GWOT: Fighting the Operatives *and* Delegitimizng the Ideology

The current U.S strategy of dismantling the Al Qaeda network and denying its operatives sanctuary appears to be validating the ideology of Al Qaeda that Islam is in imminent danger and requires the faithful to take up arms in defense of the faith. U.S. rhetoric in the GWOT also confirms militant Islam's Manichean perception that the world is divided into two opposing camps, those that uphold the faith and those that seek to destroy it. The U.S. government needs to remain engaged in this fight, but with a new strategy, one that will fight the organization *and* delegitimize the ideology. This strategy includes, above all, a plan that will not divide the world into two opposing camps and will allow space for other voices and other interpretations of the faith to be heard, including for individuals trying to redirect Islamic theology away from Al Qaeda.

As described earlier, polling data suggests that, on some level, the message and actions of Al Qaeda appear to be resonating with Muslims around the globe. First and foremost, the U.S. government should pursue a policy that does not validate Al Qaeda's message that Islam in under attack and requires Muslims to wage *jihad* in defense of the faith. Unfortunately, two conventional wars against Muslim countries appear to have validated this very claim. Polling data shows that large numbers of Muslims disagreed with the U.S. decision to go to war in Afghanistan and even more so in Iraq. Moreover, substantial numbers of Muslims polled believe that these wars are aimed at weakening Islam, including Turkey, a non-Arab country.

Polling data suggest that the continued violence and unrest in both Iraq and Afghanistan is further validating this worldview. However, withdrawing from these countries at this point may actually feed this perception instead of delegitimize it. Both Afghanistan and Iraq are in a fragile, insecure state and the removal of U.S. and international forces prior to the stabilization of these countries could fuel Al Qaeda's ideology that the West seeks to

destroy the Muslim world and that the United States wanted to turn these countries into ruinous disasters. In other words, the United States faces a catch-22 with its conventional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: its presence in these countries allows Al Qaeda to interpret this as a threat to Islam, but withdrawing from these countries and allowing civil war to take hold, could also be interpreted as a threat to these fragile Muslims states. The current U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and Iraq therefore offers no easy solution for delegitimizing Al Qaeda's claims that the United States seeks to destroy Islam.

The U.S. foreign policy program of democratization also faces a similar problem. On the one hand, the United States has called for the non-Western countries, particularly in the Middle East, to allow its citizens the right to choose their own leaders. This policy has led to the election of groups that the United States does not like, such as Hamas in Palestine and Moqtada al Sadr in Iraq. Key thinkers in Al Qaeda also have claimed that this is an effort to impose non-Muslim, secular values on the *dar al Islam*. However, allowing non-democratic regimes to persist in the Muslim world also upholds one of Al Qaeda's key criticisms, that the United States supports corrupt regimes and therefore should be attacked in order to compel its withdrawal. As with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. policy toward democratization is trapped in a catch-22.

U.S. rhetoric in the GWOT, however, offers some potential avenues for delegitimizing the ideology of Al Qaeda. Broadly, U.S. policy should aim to depolarize the Manichean thinking of these cosmic warriors and not play into it. Specifically, the U.S. government should stray away from making this a war of values, which mirrors the rhetoric of Al Qaeda's ideology and feeds the logic that both sides are locked in a zero sum battle of right versus wrong, where the other side want to take away the other's way of life. Describing the GWOT as a battle where the terrorists "want to take away our freedom" and other values, places the conflict in the spiritual realm, making it ripe for cosmic war.

The U.S. government should also help create space for a spectrum of Muslim voices "in the middle" to be heard. This would serve the dual purpose of depolarizing the Manichean thinking in cosmic war and, possibly, redirecting the theology and steering supporters away from comic war altogether. There is evidence to suggest that anti–Al Qaeda, moderate Muslim voices are emerging and offering an alternate worldview to militant Islam. For example, imprisoned members of the Egyptian Gamaat have recently released a four-volume commentary on the Qur'an, specifically challenging Al Qaeda's theological arguments for terrorism in general and American citizens in particular.[88] The Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawy, who has a regular show on Al-Jazeera, has been highly critical of Al Qaeda's theology; Qaradawy, however, is also critical of the United States.[89] Other examples of individuals and groups that embrace a new ideology of Islam include the Nobel aureate Shirin Ebadi, and moderate Muslims in the United States and western Europe that act as a beacon of reform for the worldwide Muslim community.[90]

Some analysts have suggested that the best policy for the Untied States is to support moderate Muslims that are pushing for Islamic renewal—individuals and groups that aim to take back Islam from terrorists like Al Qaeda by generating a fresh interpretation of the faith for the modern era—as the best means for fighting Islamic militancy.[91] However, embracing advocates of Islamic renewal, either through diplomacy or monetary support, fails to seriously consider the United States's unpopularity in the Muslim world. With such unpopularity, what would supporting these moderates actually do to their success? U.S. policymakers should consider that its embrace may actually discredit these movements instead of offer encouragement and growth. In other words, directly supporting these groups would be the kiss of death. Moreover, many of these advocates would probably not accept American support if it were offered. For example, reformists like Qaradawy are anti–Al

Qaeda, but they are also anti-American; he most likely would not partner with the United States.

Rather than promote these groups directly, the U.S government would do better to approach this problem indirectly and help create the necessary civic space in which these movements could take root and grow. Specifically, the United States could hold accountable the governments of the countries in which these fledgling moderates exist, using their influence and leverage to discourage governments from cracking down on these movements and imprisoning their leaders. This approach would have two positive benefits for the United States. First, it would give these individuals and organizations the necessary public space to present their ideas and, hopefully, promote dialogue, debate, and moderation within the faith. Second, making governments accountable for the standards that the United States holds dear—freedom of speech, assembly, and association—would make it look more consistent in its message to support democratization abroad and could offer the United States a chance to improve its image and credibility within the Muslim world.

The United States needs to remain engaged in this fight, but in a way that will not feed Al Qaeda's cosmic war thinking. Indirectly supporting groups that offer an alterative interpretation of the faith could redirect the theology, which is the best real world strategy for winning a cosmic war.

Notes

1. President George Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," 20 September 2001, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920–8.html (as of 26 June 2007).
2. Walter Pincus, "U.S. Sees New Al-Qaeda Threat," *Washington Post*, February 28, 2007.
3. Mark Juergensmeyer, "Sacrifice and Cosmic War," in Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 108–109. This theory is further developed in chapter two of Mark Juergensmeyer's, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God; The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
4. Juergensmeyer, "Sacrifice and Cosmic War," pp. 106–111.
5. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 148.
6. Ibid., pp. 148–149.
7. Ibid., p. 153.
8. Ibid., p. 154.
9. Ibid., p. 163.
10. For more on the differences between political and religious leadership in Shi'a and Sunni Islam, see: John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 34–48.
11. For a description of the Bhagavad Gita, see: *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated and interpreted by Franklin Edgerton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
12. Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, edited, with introduction, by Dennis Dalton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), p. 11.
13. Esposito, *Islam*, pp. 93–94.
14. John L. Esposito, *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 121.
15. Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, pp. 120–126.
16. Charles J. Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 99–133.
17. Ibid., pp. 101–102.

18. For example, see: Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), pp. 7–31; "Sayyid Qutb's America: Al Qaeda Inspiration Denounced U.S. Greed, Sexuality," *National Public Radio*, 6 May 2003, available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1253796 (as of 24 August 2007); Robert Irwin, "Qutb: Is This the Man Who Inspired Bin Laden," *Guardian*, 1 November 2001, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,584478,00.html (as of 24 August 2007); Paul Berman, "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror," *New York Times*, 23 March 2003, available at http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9F01E7D91731F930A15750C0A9659C8B63 (as of 24 August 2007).

19. Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 69–71.

20. Ibid., pp. 70–74.

21. Esposito, *Islamic Threat,* pp. 126–129.

22. Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, p. 128.

23. Also translated *The Forgotten Obligation*. For a complete translation, see: Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); see also: Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh: Muslim Extremists in Egypt* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1995).

24. His name is also transliterated as al-Farag; see Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 81–82; Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, p. 96–97.

25. For more on Salafism and its different manifestations, see: Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006), pp. 207–239.

26. To be precise, Azzam was not a member of Al Qaeda but rather its predecessor, the *Maktab al Khidamat*, which he co-founded with bin Laden. Azzam was assassinated just after the official creation of Al Qaeda in 1989. See: Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 204; Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 92–98.

27. Abdullah Azzam, "Defense of the Muslim Lands," *Religioscope*, available at http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_defence_1_table.htm (as of 1 August 2007).

28. Azzam, ibid., chapter 1, p. 3.

29. Azzam, ibid., chapter 2, p. 2.

30. Azzam, ibid., chapter 2, p. 2.

31. Azzam, ibid., Letters of Acknowledgement, pp. 1–2.

32. Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*, p. 32.

33. Abduall Azzam, "Join the Caravan," *Religioscope*, available at http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_caravan_1_foreword.htm (as of 1 August 2007), p. 8.

34. Azzam, ibid., p. 7.

35. Abdualla Azzam, "Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations," *Religioscope*, available at http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_martyrs.htm (as of 1 August 2007), pp. 1–2.

36. Azzam was assassinated in a car bomb attack on 24 November 1989, believed to be orchestrated by Egyptian hard-liners in the region, the Afghan leader Hekmatyar, bin Laden himself, or a combination of all three. See: Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 204; Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*, pp. 92–98.

37. Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 153; Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama Bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: Brassey's: 2002), pp. 110–112.

38. Jason Burke, *Al Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London: I.B. Tarus, 2003), p. 124.

39. Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 158–161; Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*, pp. 134–135; *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, edited and introduced by Bruce Lawrence, translated by James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 3.

40. The opposition followed this letter with a "Memorandum of Advice" in 1992, calling for reform and a return to the tenets of the faith. In 1994, the government cracked down on the opposition and imprisoned its key leaders. *Messages to the World*, p. 3.

41. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, pp. 115–116; Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

42. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know,* pp. 115–116.

43. Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2002), p. 80.

44. Ibid., pp. 81–82.

45. Also known as the Advice and Reformation Committee, see: *Messages to the World,* p. 3; Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, pp. 91–92.

46. *Messages to the World*, pp. 3–14.

47. "Bin Laden Declares Jihad on Americans," *Al-Islah* (London Arabic Newspaper), 2 September 1996, FBIS Translation, p. 1.

48. Ibid., p. 5.

49. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

50. Ibid., p. 4.

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